

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6611

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 0153

DQMO. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR SY KS

SUBJECT: SOUTH KOREAN INTEREST IN RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND IRAQ

1. SOUTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR TO JORDAN SANG YUNG SOH TOLD ME JANUARY 10 HE JUST PAID A "VACATION" VISIT TO SYRIA AND IRAQ. HE HAD HAD NO TROUBLE OBTAINING VISAS TO VISIT BOTH COUNTRIES. IN SYRIA HE SAID HE WAS EXTREMELY WELL RECEIVED BY PEOPLE, AND WAS IMPRESSED BY THE GREAT PERSONAL FRIENDLINESS TOWARD HIM AND HIS FAMILY OF ORDINARY SYRIANS--A DEVELOPMENT HE HAD NOT ANTICIPATED.

2. HE SAID FURTHER THAT HE HAPPENED ON A CHANCE MEETING WITH THE BROTHER OF SYRIAN DEFENSE MINISTER, MUSTAFA TLASS IN A DAMASCUS SHOP. THE BROTHER, A PRIVATE CONTRACTOR ABDUL KADR TLASS, INVITED AMBASSADOR SOH AND FAMILY TO A PERSONAL LUNCHEON IN A VILLAGE NEAR HOMS. SOH INQUIRED ABOUT SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH KOREA TLASS WAS SO GENUINELY INTERESTED THAT SOH ASKED HIM TO CONVEY TO HIS BROTHER SOUTH KOREA'S INTEREST IN ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SYRIA. SOH HAS NO INDICATION OF HOW THIS APPROACH WILL BE RECEIVED BUT KNOWS OF THE CONSIDERABLE NORTH KOREAN PRESENCE IN DAMASCUS AND PYONGYANG'S

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CONSIDERABLE LEVERAGE. HE ALSO TOLD ME THAT THE NORTH

KOREAN AMBASSADOR IN DAMASCUS IS SEEKING DUAL ACCREDITATION IN AMMAN WHERE THEY HAVE AN EMBASSY AND A CHARGE, BUT THUS FAR IT HAS BEEN RESISTED IN THE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. PRIME MINISTER RIFAI TOLD ME THE SAE THING SOME WEEKS GAO.

3. I N IRAQ CONDITIONS WERE MUCH DIFFERENT. HE MET NO OFFICIALS. PEOPLE WERE RESERVED, APPEARED HARRASSED AND GENERALLY UNFRIENDLY. HE SAID SOUTH KOREA WOULD EVENTUALLY LIKE TO OPEN RELATIONS WITH IRAQ ALSO BUT WS NOT BREAKING ITS NECK TO DO SO.

4. WOULD APPRECIATE ANY COMMENT EMBASSY DAMASCUS MIGHT HAVE, ESPECIALLY ON STRENGTH OF NORTH KOREAN SYRIAN RELATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES OF SYRIAN RECEPTIVITY TO APPROACH TO PASS ON TO AMBASSADOR SOH HERE.

PICKERING

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